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ABSTRACT

This paper describes The Toledo Museum of Art Early Childhood Program, a program that promotes knowledge and appreciation of art by young children and their families. The program supports the interactionist philosophy of early childhood education, which focuses on developmentally appropriate instruction. In interactionism, the major emphasis is on the design of a classroom environment that is predicated on a central theme. This theme approach enables the teacher to provide systematic instruction. In this approach, teachers use creative play as the core of instruction. Stories, games, paying visits, music, movement, and thoughtful discussions about works of art in local galleries stimulate children to make creative responses at the art tables. The history, aesthetics, and criticism components of art education are incorporated into lessons. Sample lessons, which show the ease with which these components can be integrated into child-centered learning, are included. Parent and community involvement in the program, and future directions for early childhood art education, are discussed. Five references are appended. (GLR)

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The Museum & Me:
An Early Childhood Art Education Model

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THE MUSEUM AND ME: AN EARLY CHILDHOOD ART EDUCATION MODEL

INTRODUCTION

Bringing works of art into the knowledge base of young children offers a creative challenge to the educator. How to make a Dutch still life painting relevant to the life of a 4-year-old, requires a firm understanding of child development as well as the historical aspects and artistic purpose of the art objects. For the past decade, the authors have combined their early childhood and art education training and experience to produce a series of unique early childhood thematic classes, based on the collections of The Toledo Museum of Art. The complexity of the program today warrants a brief discussion of its theoretical underpinnings.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Whether the focus of teaching is early childhood, art education, or a combination of both, it is important to have a grounding in educational theory. Furthermore, theory and practice must be interwoven, otherwise, instruction jumps from method to method without any firm foundation of principles. Theory with practice means that theory can inform practice which in turn is augmented by empirical evidence. Working with children this way is invigorating and demanding and requires the practitioner to be highly skilled.

Historically, early childhood traditions have focused on three main stances toward the child. The first view,empiricism, assumes that the child is an empty vessel to be filled. Diametrically opposed to this approach is nativism, which views the child as preprogrammed to unfold in certain ways. These are combined in a third way, interactionism, a belief that children are partly empty vessels, and partly preprogrammed, and that there is an interaction within and between the two (Bruce, 1987). Reviewing the components of each of these theories and how they apply to art education will provide a clearer understanding of how our approach to early childhood art education has evolved.

Empiricism subscribes to a model which perceives children as blank slates. Based on the early theories of John Locke, the teacher selects what and how the child should learn. All experiences, skills, and concepts are predetermined and then transmitted to the child. The child as a passive recipient learns through extrinsic motivation. This methodology has long been an approach followed in American elementary education and was popularized in early childhood education in the 1960s by the behaviorists, Engelmann and Becker.

In the Englemann-Becker program, it is assumed that all children can learn if properly taught. Children are seen as something to be molded into shape and to be given experiences which are necessary to fit into society. The teacher structures the curriculum in a prearranged, organized pattern of activities which maintains uniform goals for all children. In the purest form of this stance, each lesson is presented and mastered before the next is introduced.

The art experience in the empiricist process has a defined structure. Pre-planned, sequenced use of art materials requires children to follow directions in order to "create" an appropriate project. The end result is an adult-designed project with little artistic input from the children. This imitative method ignores children's independence of expression while reinforcing their reliance on teacher instruction.

Proponents of programs that are structured both in their underlying design and in the way of presentation argue that the outcome of learning for the child is maximized through the accomplishment of predetermined, measurable goals. In general, learning is "taught," not "caught".

Nativism finds its roots in the reasoning of the 18th-century viewpoint of Rousseau, who viewed children as flowers that unfold in a certain way. To tamper with the biological development is to damage the children's learning process. According to nativists, there is no sacred body of information that all children must learn, therefore, there is no prescribed curriculum. Teachers who adhere to this educational approach serve as

facilitators of knowledge rather than providers of knowledge. Observation is a major skill which must be utilized by the teacher, for each child has a unique approach to learning which must be individually nurtured.

The classroom environment is carefully designed to meet the responsive needs of children. In a classroom filled with activity centers, children teach themselves instead of being taught by adults. The classroom is designed and equipped so that children have many opportunities to explore and experiment with materials that provide immediate feed-back and which help make a series of interconnected discoveries about their physical and social world. It is a process of learning how to learn rather than learning specific content. Adults can offer help but never insist on it. Children must play, discover, and fuel their imaginations through creative interaction with the environment. This requires an indepth understanding of children's inherent maturational structures in order that teacher-intervention in the learning process is appropriate and not damaging or restrictive to children's pattern of learning.

Art experiences in the nativist method are consistent with the general approach to learning. Children have the opportunity to experiment with a variety of media. Through free-association, children produce visual responses with minimal teacher intervention and influence.

The third major stream of thought, **interactionism**, assumes that both maturation and experience play an integral role in children's learning. In essence, it focuses on developmentally appropriate instruction. This is the philosophy The Toledo Museum of Art Early Childhood program supports.

The key to the interactionist approach lies in the notion that learning is based on reciprocity. The teacher neither controls the content of knowledge nor holds back when the learning experience can be extended. Sometimes the teacher leads, sometimes the child dominates.

The term "structure" may have a negative connotation to some because it suggests the image of mechanical, insensitive rigidity. It is important to

point out that it can also exist as a constant awareness in the teacher's mind of the underlying principles of a designed curriculum. Taking advantage of the "teachable moment" as it is applied to a preplanned unit, the teacher can provide additional teaching situations. For example, during a unit on rhythm, a teacher calls attention to a child's brightly patterned shirt. Together they find repeated shapes and clap out the cadence.

In interactionism, major emphasis is placed on the design of the classroom environment which is predicated on a central theme. Through children's interaction and encounters with objects and material provisions which reinforce the theme, learning is linked to form connections. The theme approach enables the teacher to provide systematic instruction, but the vitality of the classroom life for children and their investment in that process bear a direct influence upon the motivation to learn. Learning, therefore, becomes self-rewarding through the teacher's skills to support and extend active learning.

Having shared this brief discussion of the theoretical grounding in educational theories, let us turn our attention to our unique program, initiated in 1978 at The Toledo Museum of Art.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Early childhood art education at The Toledo Museum of Art (TMA) is more than making things. Of course, young children are given the chance to express themselves and to experiment with paint, clay, and other media they love. But the goals and strategies for our programs stretch beyond skill development. Having the rich resource of fine works of art in our galleries, TMA teachers design experiences that promote knowledge and appreciation for art in the lives of children and their families.
Using the interactive approach with creative play at the core, teachers provide the structural input of stories, games, visiting guests, music,

movement, and thoughtful discussions about works of art in the galleries to stimulate rich and creative child-initiated responses at the art tables.

Through a variety of class formats, the history, aesthetics, and criticism components of art education, so often rejected by teachers as inappropriate for 4-year olds, are easily incorporated into successful lessons. The examples following show how easily these components can be integrated into child-centered learning.

MAGIC WITH MASTERPIECES

Art History comes alive when done through playful encounters with works of art. In 8-week thematic classes based on specific time periods or cultures, such as Dragon under the Drawbridge (Medieval), Treasures in a Trojan Horse (Greek), Fleur de Lis (France), Gift of the Nile (Egypt), Brushful of Tulips (Holland), or Chop Suey (a mixture of oriental cultures), 4 to 7 year-olds learn art history in concrete ways. Group discussions and learning centers featuring customs, language, geography, and daily life are highlighted with examples of traditional art forms associated with the theme to stimulate related art experiences.

Another format, BIG and little, the popular adult-child class, uses works of art and experimental media projects to encourage development of **aesthetic sensitivity**. Learning about textures, colors, balance, and contrast by talking about what is seen in a painting becomes real when exploring the same relationships with paint or clay together in the classroom.

Book Beat, a class linking stories and music to selected works of art, approaches the fundamentals of aesthetics through multiple learning modes: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. As with all learning experiences in early childhood, here young children can learn with their whole selves about the visual elements that can be found in their world. Clapping the rhythm of a tune, a visual pattern ,or a poem helps to solidify that concept through sound, sight, and movement.

Another popular program with a musical focus is our Preschool Music Month, in which classes are brought to the Museum to play in self-directed music learning centers and enjoy a mini-concert on the Dutch Cabinet Organ in the galleries.

Art criticism is a natural part of the teaching process when using works of art. Children love puzzles, and by taking apart a work of art visually, piece by piece, they learn the pleasure of knowing it from the inside out. Through guided discussions, children develop vocabulary about what is seen in a work of art, and can begin to make comparisons, express personal responses, which may differ from their classmates, and even make judgments about the work of art (Cole and Schaefer, 1990). Learning to value another person's point of view is an important component in art criticism, and lively discussions often will arise.

INVOLVING PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

Integrated in each of the class formats at T.M.A. is a strong commitment to parent involvement. Families receive at the onset of each course an introductory newsletter and lesson grid which facilitates the reinforcement and feedback outside the classroom so critical to the learning process. These materials also suggest activities that can extend the parent/child dialogue beyond the classroom. The very last lesson is always shared through work and play...from beginning to end...with the parent and child. And, as always, it is inspired by a work of art.

Weekend events also are designed to please young children and their families. One, Two, Three, an early childhood concert series, provides a lively and intimate concert experience. A new program, Family Sundays, offers Museum-wide activities with gallery tours, music, storytelling, films, and hands-on art and music projects.

In addition to Museum-based classes, the Early Childhood staff plans programs with the help of an advisory board that extends the program into the community. Through annual teacher workshops, educators are introduced to self-guided gallery tours and follow-up activities designed

for the very young. A slide package, You and Your Museum, is available for loan to help teachers prepare their preschoolers for a museum visit.

A new project soon to be tested is the production of The Toledo Museum of Art Early Childhood Discovery Boxes (Schaefer and Findling, unpublished), designed to introduce developmentally appropriate art activities into programs at daycare settings. Based around four works of art popular with young children, each box contains a teachers' guide, art reproductions, and props for learning centers.

As a theoretical challenge, the designers structured each box to appeal to a different kind of "intelligence", as identified by Howard Gardner in Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983). In this book, Gardner suggests that individuals are capable of a number of different ways of thinking: logical/mathematical, bodily/kinesthetic, musical, spatial, linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Teachers, he urges, should provide a variety of learning opportunities that relate to each intelligence, in order to stimulate growth in a variety of thinking modes.

In this project, the logical/mathematical intellectual mode is addressed in the kit Red, Yellow and Blue, which encourages systematic exploration of color mixing using drops of colored water and work sheets. The kit Moods and Feelings exercises musical, and kinesthetic responses, and children with strong interpersonal skills collaborate with others through the use of props in the Masks and Costumes kit. Collaboration on research with faculty of the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Toledo should produce interesting implications for further applications of the theory.

THE FUTURE

Through interaction with other art educators and preschool specialists who support the kind of programs The Toledo Museum of Art offers, staff members have been working hard to promote a national commitment for a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate curriculum for Early Childhood Art Education. In 1987, members of the Museum Division of

the Ohio Art Education Association held a special meeting to pool resources and identify ways Museum educators could help reach this goal. For several years presentations have been made by members of OAEA at State and National Art Education Association annual conferences urging educators to recognize how preschool and classroom settings can offer appealing, content-oriented learning activities based around works of art. Questionnaires have been designed and distributed, and articles written. The identification of appropriate guidelines for early childhood art education will give educators, curriculum designers, and administrators the support they need to offer young children the rich experiences in the arts that they truly deserve.

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